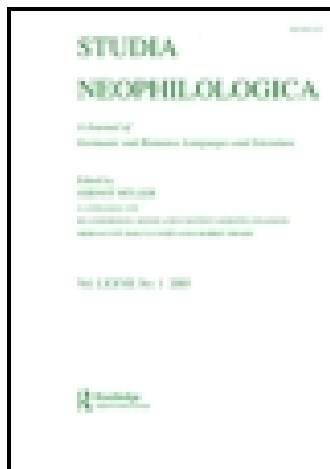


This article was downloaded by: [University of Alberta]

On: 05 October 2014, At: 05:54

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Studia Neophilologica

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/snec20>

Female epistolary literature from antiquity to the present: An introduction

Albrecht Classen^a

^a Department of German , University of Arizona , Tucson, Arizona, 85721

Published online: 21 Jul 2008.

To cite this article: Albrecht Classen (1988) Female epistolary literature from antiquity to the present: An introduction, *Studia Neophilologica*, 60:1, 3-13, DOI: [10.1080/00393278808587983](https://doi.org/10.1080/00393278808587983)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00393278808587983>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Female Epistolary Literature from Antiquity to the Present: An Introduction

ALBRECHT CLASSEN

Epistolary literature has always been a form of art difficult to define and thus has only received marginal attention among literary scholars, who often were content in collecting and editing letters, but they neglected to analyze and characterize this literary genre. Apart from the scarcity of studies on the epistle, even less research can be found dedicated to the investigation of female correspondence as a literary genre, although feminist scholarship has been able to take remarkable strides in the last decade unveiling the position and role of women in society and in the liberal arts since Antiquity and the Middle Ages.¹ Yet no study has been written so far exclusively focusing on this genre from a “feminist” point of view. Due to a renewed interest in women’s literature in general, however, individual writers of outstanding reputation gained particular attention as poetesses and as epistolary writers, such as Hildegard von Bingen, Christine de Pizan, or Madame de Sévigné. Nevertheless, the research on women’s epistolary literature lacks both a detailed analysis of this genre in its wide range from Antiquity to the present, and a comprehensive collection of women’s letters. Although neither goal can be attained in the space of this article, I intend to give an initial outline of the history and development of women’s letters and thus hope to provide the necessary framework for future studies on this topic.

The letter is either a very private and intimate form of dialogue taking the middle position between “communication et non-communication, entre solitude et solidarité, entre isolement et échange.”² The letter also can have the character of a literary work dealing with political, religious, ideological or other thoughts and ideas in a public manner. From the letter as such has to be separated the epistolary novel in which two fictional partners exchange letters and in which the correspondence only conveys two perspectives of the same author, in most cases a male author,³ and the epistolary instruction book particularly flowering in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages: the *Ars dictaminis* or *Ars dictandi*.⁴ Since many letters have often been published during the authors’ lifetime or posthumously, it is equally difficult to distinguish between private and public letters because both features easily merge and blur the categorical difference.⁵ Beyond these two groups of letters, however, a wide range of epistolary types can be extracted due to the multifunctionality of this genre.⁶ Since most anthologies and collections of epistles contain material almost exclusively written by men, there could be the impression that women cannot be credited with authorship of epistolary literature. To worsen this situation, scholarship of this genre has always shifted the focus from letters written by women to those composed by men. Equally untenable has been an often repeated statement that we are unable to detect ‘modern’ subjectivity and intimacy expressed in letters not until the rise of the 18th century, as particularly Jürgen Habermas argues.⁷ Many medieval female authors of letters, but also female writers of other periods often show very surprising directness and uninhibitedly lay bare their innermost feelings.

The history of epistolary literature goes as far back as the origin of handwriting.⁸ From very early on, letters were used for short messages or to support the memory among the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. Although the Greeks produced a remarkable body of literature, only few women appear in their annals as writers or even epistolary authors.⁹

Nevertheless a few names have come down to us together with their works, such as the correspondence by Theano, Pythagoras' wife, to Eubule on the education of children, to Nicostrate on how to cope with jealousy, or to Callisto on how to control the servants, which all excel by their "charme tout intime,"¹⁰ and also include several epistles to Euclid and the philosopher Rodopa.¹¹ The letter as a literary genre within more comprehensive works also existed, but these do not offer us insights into epistolarity as such or into female epistolary literature et al.¹² Famous female epistolary authors of Roman origin were Cornelia Gracchus writing to her son Caius, or Agrippina, Nero's mother, who pleaded for her life in her letter to her son, although in vain.¹³ The wife of Pompeius Saturninus is also said to have written remarkably literary letters. But since the history of epistolary literature, particularly of female authors, has not been written so far,¹⁴ only short aspects of its development can be given here. Among the early Carolingian female authors of letters we find the Abbess Gisla Calensis, Charlemagne's sister, and his daughter Rotruda (800 AD, April 19) addressing their spiritual councillor Alcuin.¹⁵ When Bonifatius, the English missionary worked in Germany, he kept up a lively correspondence with many of his friends or with people who were seeking his advice. Among them were also a number of women, whose letters have come down to us, such as those by Egburg (716–718), by the abbess Eangyth and her daughter Heaburg (719–722), by her daughter alone (ca. 720), Leogyda (after 732) or Cena (723–754).¹⁶ More material and certain data, however, are only extant since the 12th century, when men such as Meinhard von Bamberg, Petrus Damiani, Berengar of Tours or Anselm of Canterbury produced a rich body of epistolary literature.¹⁷ Particularly monasteries and the royal courts became centers of extensive correspondence.

Among other epistolary texts we find highly interesting literary exchanges between members of the aristocratic class in England and France in the 13th and 14th centuries using the Anglo-French language of their time. Letters by Blanche, Duchess of Bretagne to King Henry III (1263–70),¹⁸ by Aline la Desperence to Walter de Merton (1272–74),¹⁹ by Maud Pantouff to the Bishop and Chancellor Robert Burnell (1281),²⁰ by the convert Alice of Winchester to King Eduard I (1289),²¹ or by Queen Eleonore of England to her son King Eduard I (1272–91)²² fully prove that women, even if not on par with men in society as regards political power and influence, had their full share of say on a literary level and utilized it often, at least more often than male dominated scholarship has been willing to perceive, thus neglecting and ignoring female epistolary literature in general. Within these letters a wide range of topics and concerns come to the foreground reflecting the broad interests of women and, above all, their capability of expressing themselves in the form of quasi-public statements.

From the 12th century onwards a large number of female mystics began writing letters expressing their visions, revelations and images to their friends and relatives. But these letters also document the private side of the women mystics, since they extensively elaborate on economic and family affairs, sickness, travel experiences, emotions and worries in their correspondence, including messages sent from within the cloister's walls to the outside world of their families and friends, and also to their spiritual councillors and teachers.²³ Among those we find letters of extreme expressiveness and emotional openness to the reader such as those by Elisabeth von Schönaue (after 1155), Mechthild von Hackeborn (before 1299), Margarete Ebner (since 1346), or Maria von Osterwyk (1531).²⁴

Since the 14th century the sheer volume of epistolary literature increased, because a rising number of people, particularly women, were able to read and write. This change in literacy altered the general attitude towards correspondence, and more letters were issued purely private in character. Among those late medieval women writers were not only members of the higher aristocratic class, but also of the bourgeoisie. Georg Steinhausen,

in his unique collection of German medieval epistolary literature, included letters by the Countess Margarete von Nassau (1367), Duchess Johanna von Luxemburg (1371), Duchess Maria von Geldern (no date), or Arch-Duchess Beatrix of Austria (1391).²⁵ Many authors of epistolary literature also belonged to the lower noble class such as Elisabeth von Baierbrunn (1305), Barbara Marschall von Pappenheim (1434), Bertha von Liechtenstein (1454), or Adelheid von Werdenau (1489).²⁶ Some of the most interesting letters, however, were composed by members of the Wolkenstein family in Southern Tyrol, which all have some bearing on the work of the famous poet Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/77–1445). Even his daughter Maria von Wolkenstein, member of the Brixen Clarissen convent, demonstrated in her letters, written in 1455, that she had learned from her father how to fight against political oppression and for her self-determination. Her pleading letters to her brothers—her father was deceased by that time—are impressive documents of a strong female personality of the late Middle Ages.²⁷ Oswald's wife Margareta von Schwangau left a number of equally expressive letters in which she conveyed her daily concerns and emotions, and through which we can gain a vivid image of the life of a 15th-century woman on a castle in the Southern Alpine region.²⁸ Among bourgeois women writers we find Else von der Heyde (before 1400), Elisabeth van den Pullewonde (1410), Agnes Schürstab (1461), or Agnes Gelbur (1470), who do not seem to have been less eloquent in their correspondence and thus also profoundly contributed to epistolary literature.²⁹

Essential for the development of women's correspondence was the fact that in contrast to the men in the Middle Ages, women were generally well educated in the liberal arts and were hence often praised for their learnedness in a broad array of literary works. Both Wolfram von Eschenbach in his *Parzival* (vv. 337, 1 ff.), Gottfried von Straßburg in his *Tristan* (vv. 7697, 7727, 7986 etc.) and Ulrich von Lichtenstein in his *Frauendienst* provide unequivocal evidence that their female audience or in particular their patrons could as much read as the female heroines in their works. Similar observations can be deduced from contemporary French and English romances.³⁰

The most remarkable body of epistolary literature of the late Middle Ages, however, can be discovered in the letters written by the members of various families of 15th and 16th century England not of royal or aristocratic descent but representing the upper middle class: the Pastons,³¹ landowners in East Anglia, the Stonors in Oxfordshire,³² the Celys, merchants based in London,³³ and the Plumpton from near Harrogate.³⁴ Since they have left us their everyday correspondence of all family members including the mothers and daughters, these letters written by the women gain our special interest. They demonstrate how assertive and resolute some of them could be and how they did not have to rely on their men's protection. A similarly astounding portrait emerges from the letters by Margareta von Schwangau mentioned above. These literary works have not, however, attracted the same kind of public interest as many later epistolary works do. A particularly striking feature in these letters are the emotional approach and the personal concern expressed by these women writers. Despite many formulaic structures guiding the authors in writing their letters, very individual worries about their husbands' well-being in mind and body come to the fore and allow us to see in these 15th and 16th centuries' letters statements of utmost sensibility and privacy—thus shocking considering the generally lasting impact of medieval ideas and social concepts on the individual even at that late time.

Furthermore, in contrast to the understanding of many, women were also well capable of intervening in the politics of their time, as the Swedish mystic St. Birgitta (1303–1373) and her "disciple" St. Catherine (1347–1380) demonstrated. Whereas the first, once having moved to Rome in 1349, basically produced a remarkable body of mystic writings,

St. Catherine dedicated most of her literary endeavours to the epistolary genre. More than 389 letters are still extant in which she addressed a wide range of high and low ranking personalities of her time. Both women saints could be described as the perhaps most elaborate and most outspoken female politicians in the 14th century, who used their energy to convince the Pope to move back from Avignon in France to Rome, to instigate the contemporaries to repent, and to call for a crusade against the heathens. Although neither of the two women could induce the Pope to return to Rome in the long run, both their literary works—St. Birgitta's mystical accounts and St. Catherine's letters—present them as extremely impressive and agile personalities of the late Middle Age.³⁵

Since the Reformation epistolary literature developed to an even wider scope and included practically all forms of public and private messages. The contrast between letters intentionally written for publication and letters only destined for very personal purposes became more noticeable.

In the early 16th century, Argula von Grumbach, a religiously inspired woman of German aristocratic descent, emerged as a highly vocal letter writer, since she resorted to a mixture of private epistle and public pamphlet urging various Southern German cities and Dukes or Princes to listen to Luther's interpretation of the Bible and to become followers of his church.³⁶ These letters aroused a large interest among the general public because of their straightforwardness and, above all, because of the fact that Argula was a woman and nevertheless dared to get involved in political and religious affairs of her days unheard of before. Although much of the material of her pen is lost, we can assume with certainty that she was in close touch with the leading reformators such as Spalatin and Luther.

In the world of the Italian Renaissance with its typical development of a strong urban life-style and mercantilism, the role of correspondence acquired a special degree, represented by the remarkable collection of letters exchanged between the Prato merchant Francesco di Marco Datini and his wife Margherita di Domenico Bandini beginning in 1386 about their household and business worries, but above all with the constant undertone of complaints about her childlessness and the subsequent constant strain on their marriage,³⁷ unfortunately still almost exclusively unpublished. About 100 years later, another Italian woman achieved high literary skills with her correspondence from 1535 to 1542: Isabella Sacchetti Guicciardini from Arezzo, extremely expressive in her internal and external concerns about the household, the estate, its economy, and above all the well-being of her family.³⁸ Guicciardini's correspondence deserves the modern reader's attention particularly because of its lively style and the affectionate tone in which she wrote her letters. Both detailed aspects of the daily business of growing fruit and raising cattle and her correspondent's physical well being coalesce providing an extremely vivid image of a Toscan's woman's life in the 16th century. Equally interesting, but of a completely different character, is the correspondence carried out by the Italian humanist Laura Cereta (1469–1499), in which she discussed learned matters and daily events with a very large number of friends, relatives and scholars. These have been described as "more or less formal orations . . . , occasions for formal presentations of an author's view on various subjects".³⁹ Furthermore she expressed her interest in all of the humanists' studies such as philosophy, philology or morals in a large number of letters revealing her intellectual skills and eloquence. She was, however, particularly enthused by mathematics and astrology. Interestingly, Laura was not the only woman humanist at all, and thus not the only female humanist correspondent. Like her, Maddalena Scrovegni, Battista de Montefeltro Malatesta, Costanza Varasso, Ippolita Sforza or Cassandra Fedele composed a number of outstanding letters in which they discussed learned matter in a very sophisticated manner paralleling their male counterparts in all aspects. But nevertheless they had to defend this

position in the strongest terms and yet had mostly to succumb to the world's pressure against women scholars, although they proudly heralded their literary achievements in their epistolary works such as Ginevra Nogarola: "Genevra anogarolis scripsi manu mea immaculata"—"I, Ginevra Nogarola wrote this with my immaculate hand".⁴⁰

Italy in general seems to have been an excellent breeding ground for female epistolary literature in the 16th century. Those letters by Julia Gonzaga,⁴¹ by Vittoria Colonna, Isabella d'Este or Emilia Pia, convey an amazing liveliness and humour, combined with equal vivacity and witicism,⁴² which was only partially paralleled by women in contemporary France such as Renée of France, Margaret of France, Diana of Poitiers or Henry II's two daughters Madeline and Margaret. There seems to have been a visible difference in their writing styles, inasmuch as their epistles are marked by brevity, acute precision and a lack of passion, as Maulde la Clarière indicates in his study on women in the Renaissance.⁴³ Likewise in England women strove to rise to literacy and increased the exchange of letters with each other since the late 16th century, but also sent out public pamphlets, such as Jane Anger did in 1598, or Rachel Spegth, only to be followed by many others.⁴⁴ Interestingly, female authors particularly encountered sharp criticism by women against learning for women. Lady Bradshaigh in her letter to Samuel Richardson, Lady Sarah Pennington to her daughter, or Maria Edgeworth, all in the late 18th century, strongly advocated a non-literary education of women, although they themselves were well able to produce elaborate epistolary literature, but they were dreading the masculinization of women if they became more exposed to knowledge through literacy.⁴⁵

With the rising importance of France as a cultural center of Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, the French language also became the exclusive linguistic medium for letter writing. At the same time a large number of outstanding female poets of epistolary literature can be found, such as Jeanne-François Fremoyt (Sainte Chantal, 1572–1641), the Marquise de Sévigné (1626–1696), Madelaine de Scudéry (1607–1701), Jacqueline Pascal (1625–1661), Mademoiselle de Lespinasse (1732–1776), Germaine de Staël (1766–1817), or the revolutionary Charlotte Corday (1768–1793).⁴⁶ These correspondences often convey an impressive image of the situation in Paris or Versailles and reveal basic elements of the French culture during absolutism. In parenthesis, the development and technical improvement if not perfection of mail delivery in the 17th and 18th centuries provided epistolary literature with a most important impetus for its advancement. Parallel to the great literature of the period of absolutism, epistolary literature thus conquered its own niche in the general development of the arts.⁴⁷ Of particular interest are the letters written by Liselotte von der Pfalz, or more properly, Elisabeth Charlotte, Duchess of Orléans (1652–1727), who married the Duke Philipp I of Orléans in 1671 and lived with him at the court of Versailles. Her letters, which she composed in German, were not destined for publication and thus kept their very private nature. They have a highly documentary value and closely reflect the lifestyle of the French aristocracy from a German perspective.⁴⁸ Similarly revealing are the letters by Madame de Sévigné to her daughter, who had moved to the Provence with her husband in 1671. In Germany the French influence on epistolarity only ended when C. F. Gellert published his treatise on how to write good letters in 1742.⁴⁹ Resistance against the French dominion, however, seems always to have been a part of the German women writers' tradition, even if they lived at the French court at Versailles such as Liselotte von der Pfalz.⁵⁰ Frau Gottsched's correspondence became a model piece for highly developed female epistolary literature.⁵¹ In most collections of letters, however, male poets were involved in a literary exchange with their wives or females friends, such as Meta Moller with Klopstock, Sophie La Roche with Wieland, Eva König with Lessing, Katharina Elisabeth Goethe (Textor) with her famous son Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Lotte von Lengenfeld with Friedrich Schiller, Susette Gontard with Friedrich Hölderlin,

Charlotte von Kalb with Jean Paul, or, as an example from 19th century French poetry, Juliette Frouet with Victor Hugo.⁵² Lady Mary Wortley Montague (1689–1762) proved both in her “Turkish Embassy Letters” from 1766 and in her private correspondence with her friend Algarotti and her daughter, Lady Bute, that women could be as much literate as any other author in their time, and that they also were fully able to produce remarkably expressive letters of intimate character. Among other correspondents she even had an intensive exchange with Frederick the Great.⁵³

Women rulers such as Elizabeth I,⁵⁴ Catherine II of Russia,⁵⁵ Maria-Theresia of Hapsburg Austria, or Queen Victoria of England⁵⁶ issued not only a large number of official letters, but they also intensively reported of their own life and experiences in their private correspondence. Particularly Maria-Theresia’s letters to her much beloved daughter Marie Antoinette, after she had moved to Paris to marry the French king in 1769, deserve our attention, since the mother tried to educate and give council to her daughter over distance. This correspondence has indirectly revealed what the Austrian Empress thought about the political situation in pre-revolutionary France.⁵⁷ Similarly Queen Victoria of England regularly corresponded with her daughter Victoria, married to the later German Emperor Frederick III. In their letters they gradually moved from discussions about private and family affairs to increasingly political matters.⁵⁸

During the French Revolution women particularly demonstrated their extensive ability to formulate their ideas and to voice their political and ideological concerns. Recent editions document their strong impact on the course of the Revolution and, above all, their intentions to improve the general status of women in society. Apart from the amazing quantity of official documents such as pamphlets, testimonies, appeals, or declarations, their correspondence forms an important part of the history of epistolary literature.⁵⁹

The 19th century witnessed the ever increasing number of letters, and some correspondence of practically all major writers has been preserved. Particularly the romantics dedicated much effort to epistolary literature, among them above all the German women romantics such as Bettina von Brentano, Sophie von Brentano (1776–1800), Caroline Schlegel (1763–1809), or Rachel von Varnhagen. Bettina von Arnim (1785–1859), who fell in love with the 60 year old Goethe when she was only 12, wrote him a large number of letters which made her famous when she published them after her husband’s and Goethe’s death.⁶⁰ In the late 19th and early 20th centuries a considerable number of socialist women writers also expressed their major political concerns in their letters, such as Clara Zetkin (1857–1933) or Rosa Luxemburg (1870–1919).⁶¹ The correspondence by the latter, *Briefe aus dem Gefängnis* (*Letters out of Prison*) gained a comparable reputation as those by Antonio Gramsci, imprisoned by Mussolini in 1926, in which she openly reported about her personal problems and emotions, her exhaustion and depression. Even though they appear to be unpolitical at first sight—they also had to pass censure—they nevertheless contain many hints about Rosa’s political ideas and concepts and thus even increase their literary value. In her correspondence “we see the woman, the lover, the companion, the friend of nature and poetry, the prisoner who charms her jailer, the employer, the cook, and, of course, the political activist.”⁶²

Although the 19th century primarily witnessed the emergence of love letters exchanged between husband and wife, between mistress and lover such as between the poetess George Sand and Alfred de Musset, between the musicians Mathilde Wesendonck and Richard Wagner, or between Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms, this particular type of epistolary genre was not limited to this century alone. Apart from the famous, but often and heatedly discussed love letters of the 12th century couple Abélard and Héloïse, which might even lack the characteristic epistolarity and hence would fall into the category of fictional correspondence, people from all centuries produced many intimate and artfully

composed love letters, even though amatory letters, and particularly those written by women, seem to have gained a special degree of intimacy and candor since the 19th century.⁶³ In general, however, when we discuss the typology of epistolary literature, it is hard to limit the scope of this genre. Women of all classes and all cultural backgrounds throughout all centuries composed letters for a wide range of purposes including love letters, and thus hold a much larger share in "literature" than standard and traditional scholarship has been willing to accept.

Several American female writers of epistolary literature also should be included in our investigation, since they contributed remarkable examples to this genre. Calamity Jane, or under her real name Martha Jane Hickock (1852–1900?) wrote emotionally moving letters to her daughter Janey, in which she tried to outline her own life as a roamer and thereby to advise her daughter to decide upon a different life. Quite differently Anne Morrow Lindbergh (born in 1906) reflected in her letters on her life with her famous husband and on the tragedy of the murder of her child Charles Jr in 1930. In some of her letters she conveyed experiences which were quite similar to those by Antoine de St.-Exupéry. Both religious and reverential are Margaret Fuller's (1810–1850) letters to many political friends of her time, but above all to her musical idol Ludwig van Beethoven.⁶⁴

The late 19th and 20th centuries offer, however, more problems in outlining the important contributions to epistolary literature than any other century before them. Both Annette von Droste-Hülshoff (1797–1848), Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923), and Emily Dickinson (1830–1886), all of them were remarkable writers and composers of memorable correspondences at the same time. It will always remain an extremely important aspect of female literacy that women formulated much of their thoughts and ideas in letters.⁶⁵ In addition, women gained, particularly in the early 20th century, a considerable role in the development of democracy in Western Europe and in Russia, such as the German Gertrud Bäumer, one of the leading female activists in the women movement, and a member of the government.⁶⁶ She left not only an astounding body of essays and scholarly literature, but also a voluminous body of letters in which she reflected upon her daily experiences in the political arena. Not before the second part of the 20th century, however, epistolary literature has been losing its literary and political impact due to the competition of the new media and communication technologies. This, however, has not meant the end of epistolary literature altogether, even though the literary role of letters seems to be in retreat.⁶⁷

To sum up: Women not only contributed to a large extent to the production of the astoundingly extensive body of epistolary literature, but they also determined the development of this genre more often and to a higher degree than has been thought so far. It is, of course, impossible to say whether female or male epistolary literature deserves more or less of our attention, but if we consider this genre as such, the equal share of letters by women as by men has to be taken into account. The wide range of themes, concerns, ideas, objectives and contents of these epistles cannot be divided into a few categories. Epistolary literature offers not only a key to a far reaching understanding of our own culture, but it also opens a new perspective on the literary achievements of women of all times, even then when men seem to have dominated the whole spectrum of public life such as in Antiquity.

Female epistolary literature not only provides us with cultural insights, in other words it is not only a source for cultural history, but it also proves to be more than a collection of intimate confessions. Instead we gain a deep understanding of female literacy, female literary expressions and female literary culture. Thus this brief historical survey might help to comprehend how much women could get involved in all aspects of life and were not limited to the traditional spheres of the household and the raising of children, even though

that seems never to have been excluded either. For the sake of our understanding of what kind of female epistolarity existed, we should keep in mind that we deal with a large body of diverse female literature, and we should not insist on more minute criteria for differentiating letters as dialogue, talk, or as oration, unless we accept them as sub-categories.⁶⁸ Efforts to classify epistles or published letters as literature and hence unpublished letters as non-literary, non-fictional texts, seems to be futile and does not touch upon the actual question of female epistolarity. Yet there are a multiplicity of epistolary types ranging from the simple private message or communication to public dedication letters.⁶⁹ But this distinction again only blurs a more important aspect which this paper has tried to outline, the distinction between female and male epistolary literature, which is widely neglected and hardly ever addressed by scholars on this genre.

We have in this paper, though, neither tried to investigate in detail how stylistic features developed nor have we characterized individual correspondences, whether there might be stylistic differences between male and female epistolary literature, or in how far women's letters have to be perceived as literary products. All of that requires a critical analysis, but before we begin studying female epistolarity as such, we need to know the historical dimensions of this literary phenomenon. Even though we have only been able to provide a rough outline of the general development, this study will, as I hope, serve as a guideline for future studies on female literature throughout the centuries.

Department of German
University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona 85721

NOTES

- 1 Ivana Savalli: *La donna nella società della Grecia antica* (Bologna: Patron, 1983); Jane F. Gardner: *Women in Roman Law & Society* (London-Sydney: Croom Helms, 1986); Shulamith Shahar: *The Fourth Estate. A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, translated by Chaya Galai (London-New York, Methuen, 1983); Peter Ketsch: *Frauen im Mittelalter*, 2 vols., ed. by Annette Kuhn (Düsseldorf: Schwan, 1983); Edith Ennen: *Frauen im Mittelalter* (Munich: Beck, 1984).
- 2 Susan Lee Carrell: *Le soliloque de la passion féminine ou le dialogue illusoire, Etude d'une formule monophonique de la littérature épistolaire*, études littéraires françaises (Paris-Tübingen: Place-Narr, 1982), p. 11; a generic distinction between letter and epistle was often proposed in the 19th century, but modern scholarship has abandoned this concept, cf. Klaus Thraede: *Grundzüge griechisch-römischer Briefftopik*, Zetemata 48 (Munich: Beck, 1970), pp. 1 ff.
- 3 Frank Singer Godfrey: *The Epistolary Novel; Its Origin, Development, Decline, and Residuary Influence* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963); Hans Rudolf Picard: *Die Illusion der Wirklichkeit im Briefroman des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1971); Laurent Versini: *Le roman épistolaire*, Littérature Moderne (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1979); Ruth Perry: *Women, Letters and the Novel* (New York: AMS Press, 1980); Linda S. Kauffman: *Discourse of Desire. Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 1986).
- 4 Carl Erdmann: *Studien zur Briefliteratur Deutschlands im elften Jahrhundert*, Schriften des Reichsinstituts für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde I (Stuttgart: Monumenta Germaniae Historia, 1938, reprint 1952), p. 6; J. Hlavacek: "Briefwesen und Briefliteratur in Ost- und Südosteuropa sowie in Skandinavien", in: *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 2/3 (Munich-Zürich: Artemis, 1982), col. 672, refers to the correspondence exchanged between the royal court of Prague under Charles IV and the Italian humanists such as Petrarch; see in particular H. M. Schaller: "Ars dictaminis, Ars dictandi", in: *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 1 (Munich-Zürich: Artemis, 1980), cols. 1034-1038.
- 5 Konrad Krautter: "Acsi ore ad os ... Eine mittelalterliche Theorie des Briefes und ihr antiker Hintergrund", in: *Antike und Abendland* 28 (1982), 2, p. 155.
- 6 Karl Ermert: *Briefsorten, Untersuchungen zu Theorie und Empirie der Textklassifikation*, Reihe Germanistische Linguistik 20 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1979), p. 5.
- 7 Jürgen Habermas: *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit, Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Neuwied-Berlin: Luchterhand, 1965), p. 161; Ermert, p. 5f.; even when women editors published epistolary anthologies, they fell prey to the male stereotype

- concepts that only men wrote letters worth preserving for posterity, cf. *Briefe der Deutschen aus einem Jahrtausend*, mit einer Einführung von Ina Seidel (Leipzig: Reclam, 1943).
- 8 F.-J. Schmale: "Allgemeine Spätantike, Byzanz, lateinisches Mittelalter", in: *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 2/3 (Munich-Zürich: Artemis, 1982), col. 648.
 - 9 E. Paoli: "Sulla corrispondenza amorosa degli antichi", in: *Studi italiani di filologia classica* 3 (1923), pp. 251-257; standard literary histories such as A. Lesky: *Geschichte der Griechischen Literatur*, 3rd ed., revised and enlarged (Munich-Bern: Francke, 1971), almost completely neglect this genre, not to speak of female epistolarity.
 - 10 Clarisse Bader: *La femme grecque, étude de la vie antique* (Paris: Didier, 1872), p. 406, translation of the letters into French there, pp. 407 ff.; the original edition in: Rudolf Hercher: *Epistolographi Graeci* (Paris: Didot, 1873), pp. 603-607.
 - 11 Female correspondence in antiquity is completely neglected in studies such as those by Thraede, or Chan-Hie Kim: *Form and Structure of the Familiar Greek Letter of Recommendation*, Dissertation Series 4 (Missoula, Minnesota: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972); the same applies to studies on Roman letters, cf. Carol Dana Lanham: *Salutatio Formulas in Latin Letters to 1200: Syntax, Style, and Theory*, Münchener Beiträge zur Mediävistik und Renaissance-Forschung 22 (Munich: Ardeo, 1975).
 - 12 E. Paoli; Hermann Peter: *Der Brief in der römischen Literatur*, reprint of the Leipzig 1901 ed. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1965).
 - 13 *A Treasury of the World's Great Letters, from Ancient Days to our Own Time*, ed. by M. Lincoln Schuster (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1930), pp. 20-22; Peter does not mention one female author of epistolary literature, although his study on the Roman letters otherwise seems to be of a rather comprehensive scope.
 - 14 Georg Steinhausen: *Geschichte des deutschen Briefes, Zur Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Volkes*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Gaertner, 1889-1891), reprint 1968; most recently F.-J. Schmale, col. 656; Erdmann, p. 1; Gustav Hillard: "Vom Wandel und Verfall des Briefes", in: *Von der Beständigkeit, Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Otto Henschle*, ed. by Horst Schumacher (Mühlacker: Stieglitz, 1970), pp. 16-33.
 - 15 Published in: *Monumenta Germaniae Historia, Epistolarum IV, Karolini Aevi II* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1895), Nr. 196, p. 232 ff.
 - 16 *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, ed. by Michael Tangl, MGH, *Epistolae Selectae I* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1955), 2nd unchanged ed., Nr. 13, pp. 18 ff.; Nr. 14, pp. 21 ff.; Nr. 15, pp. 26 ff.; Nr. 29, pp. 52 ff.; Nr. 97, pp. 217 f.
 - 17 Erdmann, p. 1.
 - 18 *Recueil de lettres Anglo-Françaises (1265-1399)*, par F. J. Tanqueray (Paris: Champion, 1916), Nr. 3, p. 4.
 - 19 *Recueil*, Nr. 10, p. 10 f.
 - 20 *Recueil*, Nr. 27, p. 27.
 - 21 *Recueil*, Nr. 61, p. 61.
 - 22 *Recueil*, Nr. 64, p. 64, cf. also Nr. 65, p. 64 f.; also see la Longespée's letter to him Nr. 83, 1272-1307, p. 88, or Eleanore la Despensere's letter to the sheriff of Glamorgan, John Inge, 1322, Nr. 108, p. 113 f. among others.
 - 23 *Deutsche Mystikerbriefe des Mittelalters 1100-1550*, ed. by Wilhelm Oehl (Munich-Vienna: Langen-Müller, 1931, reprint Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972): "Da offenbart sich vielfach das Ich in frischester Aussprache, in aller Eigenart und Gegenständlichkeit, voll kulturgeschichtlicher Stofflichkeit ... Wir sehen und hören da die mittelalterlichen Heiligen und Frommen in ihrem allerpersönlichsten Leben, nicht hieratisch steif auf Goldgrund in feierlichem Mosaik, sondern als fühlende, leidende, ringende, irrende Menschen wie unseresgleichen", p. XIX.
 - 24 Oehl, Nr. IV, pp. 113 ff.; Nr. XII, pp. 228 ff., Nr. XX, pp. 344 ff. and Nr. XL, pp. 682 ff., cf. *Meister des deutschen Briefes*, selected and ed. by Theodor Klaiber and Otto Lyon (Bielefeld-Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing, 1901), p. 2: "Innerlichkeit ist das bezeichnende Wort für die ganze Erscheinung".
 - 25 *Deutsche Privatbriefe des Mittelalters*, ed. by Georg Steinhausen, 1st vol.: *Fürsten und Magnaten, Edle und Ritter*, Denkmäler der deutschen Kulturgeschichte, 1st section: Briefe, 1st vol. (Berlin: Gaertner, 1899), pp. 3-19, Number 1-19, but many more follow afterwards.
 - 26 Steinhausen, pp. 457-495, Number 513, 522, 542 and 578; see also *Analecta Sanctae Hildegardis*, opera spicilegio solesmensi parata, ed. by J. B. Pitra (Farnborough, Hunts./England: Gregg, 1966, reprint of the 1882 ed.); cf. Hildegard von Bingen: *Briefwechsel, nach den ältesten Handschriften übersetzt und nach den Quellen erläutert von Adelgundis Führkötter* (Salzburg: Müller, 1965).
 - 27 Wilhelm Baum: *Nikolaus Cusanus in Tirol. Das Wirken des Philosophen und Reformators als*

- Fürstbischof von Brixen*, Schriftenreihe des Südtiroler Kulturinstitutes 10 (Bozen: Athesia, 1983), pp. 122–125; Hermann Hallauer: "Nikolaus von Kues und das Brixener Klarissenkloster", in: *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft* 6 (1967), pp. 75–123.
- 28 Albrecht Classen: "Margareta von Schwangau: Epistolary Literature in the German Late Middle Ages", in: *Medieval Perspectives* I, 1 ed. by Pedro Campa, Charles W. Connell, Robert J. Vallier, SEM A 1987, pp. 41–53; Georg Steinhausen, p. 358 ff., Nr. 532 and p. 360, Nr. 533.
- 29 Steinhausen, 2nd vol. (Berlin: 1907), p. 131, Nr. 4 and following, Nr. 7, p. 133, Nr. 41 ff., p. 158 ff., and Nr. 50, p. 164 f.
- 30 Herbert Grundmann: "Die Frauen und die Literatur im Mittelalter. Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Entstehung des Schrifttums in der Volkssprache", in: H. G.: *Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, vol. 3, Bildung und Sprache, Schriften der MGH 25, 3 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1978), pp. 67–95; Joachim Bumke: *Höfische Kultur, Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter*, vol. 2 (Munich: dtv, 1986), pp. 476 f.; Ketsch, vol. 2, p. 215, observes that the preponderance of female over male literacy levelled out only in the late Middle Ages with the rise of a bourgeois lifestyle and its need for learned clerks and administrators.
- 31 *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Norman Davis (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1971).
- 32 *The Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290–1483*, ed. for the Royal Historical Society, from the Original Documents in the Public Record Office by C. L. Kingsford (London: Office of the Society, 1919).
- 33 *The Cely Letters 1472–1488*, ed. by Alison Hanham, EETS OS 273 (London–New York–Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975).
- 34 *Plumpton Correspondence, A Series of Letters, Chiefly Domestieck, Written in the Reign of Edward IV. Richard III. Henry VII. and Henry VIII*, ed. by Thomas Stapleton (London: The Camden Society, 1839); Elizabeth de Pole calls herself "beadwoman" in her letter to her husband Robert Plumpton, 26. Nov. 1501, Nr. 128, whereas Agnes Plumpton resorts to the usual term "wife", 26. Nov. 1502, Nr. 133 e.g.; cf. *The Oxford Book of Late Medieval Verse and Prose*, ed. by Douglas Gray, With a Note on Grammar and Spelling in the Fifteenth Century, by Norman Davis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 33.
- 35 *Le lettere di S. Caterina da Siena*, con note di Niccolo Tommasèo, a cura di piero Misciatelli (Firenze: Giunti-Barbèra, 1970, reprint of the 1940 ed.); for St. Birgitta see Tore S. Nyberg: "Birgitta, St.", in: *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. 2 (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1983), p. 246 f.
- 36 Albrecht Classen: "Argula von Grumbach", forthcoming in: *Dictionary of Continental Women Writers*, ed. by K. M. Wilson (New York: Garland Press, 1987).
- 37 Iris Origo: *The Merchant of Prato, Francesco di Marco Datini* (New York: Octagon, 1979), reprint of the 1957 ed.
- 38 "A Matron of the Cinquecento. Being Certain Letters written by Isabella Guicciardini", in: Isidoro del Lungo: *Women of Florence*, translated by Mary Steegmann, with Preface by Guido Biagi (New York: Doubleday Page, 1908).
- 39 Albert Rabil, Jr.: *Laura Cereta: Quattrocento Humanist*, Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies 3 (Bringham, New York: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance, 1981), p. 24 f.
- 40 *Her Immaculate Hand*, selected Works by and about the Women Humanists of Quattrocento Italy, ed. by Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil, Jr, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 20 (Bingham, New York: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1983), pp. 11 and 131.
- 41 Ed. by M. Amante, see R. de Maulde la Clavière: *The Women of the Renaissance, A Study of Feminism*, translated by G. A. Ely (London: George Allen, 1911), p. 303.
- 42 Ibid., p. 305 ff.
- 43 Ibid., p. 308, print of several letters by various women thereafter.
- 44 Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus: *Half Humankind. Context and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England 1540–1640* (Urbana–Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), pp. 20 ff.; here, however, we deal more with political statements about women's role in life uttered by women, not so much with letters as such.
- 45 Bridget Hill: *Eighteenth-Century Women: An Anthology* (London–Boston–Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984), pp. 56 ff.; Hillard, see fn. 14, states quite correctly that the 17th and 18th centuries' France developed the highest possible form of an epistolary society, p. 17.
- 46 Collected in Gustave Lanson: *Choix de lettres du XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1913), 10th ed.; for Madame de Sévigné see her *Correspondence*, texte établi, présenté et annoté par Roger Duchêne, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1973); cf. Fritz Nies: *Gattungspoetik und Publikumsstruktur. Zur Geschichte der Sévignébriefe*, Theorie und Geschichte der Literatur und der Schönen Künste 21 (Munich: Fink, 1972).
- 47 Axel Preiss: "Correspondance", in: *Dictionnaire des littératures de langue française*, vol. 1 (Paris: BORDA, 1984), p. 552.

- 48 *The Letters of Madame. The Correspondence of Elizabeth-Charlotte of Bavaria, Princess Palatinate, Duchess of Orleans, called "Madame" at the Court of King Louis XIV*, 2 vols., translated and ed. by Gertrude Scott Stevenson (New York: Appleton, 1925); a more recent translation into French is: *Lettres de Madame Duchesse d'Orléans née Princess Palatinate*, ed. by Olivier Amiel (Paris: Mercure, 1981).
- 49 C. F. Gellert: *Briefe, nebst einer Praktischen Abhandlung von dem guten Geschmack in Briefen*, in: *C. F. Gellerts sämtliche Schriften*, vierter Theil (Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben/Fritsch, 1769, reprint Darmstadt: Olms, 1968).
- 50 Wilhelm Grenzmann: "Brief", in: *Reallexikon der Deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, 2nd ed. by Werner Kohlschmidt and Wolfgang Mohr (Berlin: Gruyter, 1958), p. 189f.
- 51 *Briefe der Luise Adelgunde Viktorie Gottsched geborne Kulmus*, ed. by Dorothea Henriette von Runkel (Dresden: Harpeters Wittwe, 1771-1772).
- 52 See the collection *Briefe der Liebe aus sechs Jahrhunderten* (Heidelberg: Keyser, 1948); cf. also the anthology by Klaiber and Lyon, see fn. 24.
- 53 *Journeys. Autobiographical Writings by Women*, ed. by Mary Grimley Mason and Carol Hurd Green (Boston, Mss.: Hall, 1979), pp. 56-71, she proved to be a woman "whose literary talents gave a focus to her life and enabled her to escape the confinement of a decadent and frivolous society", p. 59.
- 54 *The Letters of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. by G. B. Harrison (London: Cassell, 1935).
- 55 *Correspondence of Catherine the Great when Grand-Duchess, with Sir Charles Honburg-Williams, and Letters from Count Poniatowski*, ed. and translated by Earl Ilchester and Mrs Langford-Brooke (London: Butterworth, 1928).
- 56 *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, Second Series, a Selection from her Majesty's Correspondence and Journal between the Years 1862 and 1878, ed. by George Earle Buckle, in 2 vols. (New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1926); for her private letters consult *Further Letters of Queen Victoria from the Archives of the House of Brandenburg-Prussia*, translated from the German by J. Pudney and Lord Sudley, ed. by Hector Bolitho (London: Butterworth, 1938).
- 57 *Briefe der Kaiserin Maria Theresia an ihre Kinder und Freunde*, ed. by Alfred Ritter von Arneth (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1978).
- 58 Jutta Radel, ed.: *Liebe Mutter, liebe Tochter, Frauenbriefe aus drei Jahrhunderten*, with a foreword by J. Ausländer, Ullstein Buch 20230 (Frankfurt-Berlin: Ullstein, 1982), p. 83ff.; cf. Bolitho.
- 59 *Women in Revolutionary Paris 1789-1795*, selected Documents, translated with Notes and Commentary by Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Bransar Applewhite, Mary Durham Johnson (Chicago-London: University of Illinois Press Urbana, 1979).
- 60 *Frauenbriefe der Romantik*, ed. by Paul Landau (Berlin: Bard, 1923); *Romantiker-Briefe*, ed. by Friedrich Gundelfinger [Gundolf] (Jena: Diederichs, 1907); see also the collection by Klaiber and Lyon, fn. 24.
- 61 Rosa Luxemburg: *Ich umarme Sie in großer Sehnsucht. Briefe aus dem Gefängnis 1915-1918*, foreword by Nahiriko Ito (Berlin-Bonn: Nietz Nachf., 1980).
- 62 Henry Pacher: "Foreword", in: *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. and with an Introduction by Stephen Eric Bronner (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1978), p. VIII.
- 63 See *Love Letters, an Anthology* chosen by Antonia Fraser (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976); *Festa d'amore, le più belle lettere di amore di tutti i tempi e di tutti i paesi*, a cura di Carla Betocchi (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1969); the most recent discussion on this topic is carried out by Linda S. Kauffman, see fn. 3, pp. 64ff.
- 64 Radel, p. 129ff.
- 65 *Frauen im Aufbruch, Frauenbriefe aus dem Vormärz und der Revolution von 1848*, ed. by Fritz Böttger (Darmstadt-Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1979).
- 66 Gertrud Bäumer: *Des Lebens wie der Liebe Band, Briefe*, ed. by Emmy Beckmann (Tübingen: Wunderlich, 1956); see Albrecht Classen: "Gertrud Bäumer", forthcoming in: *Dictionary of Continental Women Writers*, ed. by K. M. Wilson (New York: Garland).
- 67 Hillard, p. 32: "Denn mit dem Verschwinden der Handschrift verschwindet die optische Gegenwart des Schreibenden ... So geht der Brief einer Entwicklung entgegen, die die Individualität mehr und mehr entfremdet, sie schließlich auslöschen wird"; this seems, however, to be a too pessimistic view, since the real threat against correspondence is such as only directed against the official letters and not so much against the personal and intimate, and hence at the same time literary letter.
- 68 Thraede, p. 27ff. and 47ff.
- 69 Paolo Cugusi: *Evoluzione e forme dell' epistolografia latina nella tarda repubblica e nei primi due secoli dell' impero con cenni sull' epistolografia preciceroniana* (Roma: Herder, 1983), pp. 105-135).